Women, Change, and Iran

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This study analyzed the Iranian government's policy toward women over the course of the past fifty years. The analysis sought to determine when and how women influenced changes in policy. Samuel P. Huntington's discussion of modernization in *Political Order in Changing Societies* provides a framework with which to asses the influence of women. Other authors such as Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan in *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* provide insight into the concept of influence and its assessment. When these frameworks are applied to Iran, it reveals a model that argues that traditional and modernizing forces shape the development of Iranian politics. Iranian politics can be seen as a set of circles of influence. Within these circles are the Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council, the Parliament, and the President. From time to time women have been able to enter these circles.

Finally, the research reveals that modernizing women have had success achieving certain levels of power and influence within the domestic politics of Iran. However, further study failed to show a causal link between women and change. Women have had some success in influencing the politics of Iran through the mechanisms of state bureaucracy, mobilization of masses of people, and through other groups. All that said, the political bureaucracy of the Islamic Republic of Iran stifles anything more substantial than modest changes to policy and Iranian society.

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Abstract

WOMEN, CHANGE, AND IRAN by MAJ Michelle M. T. Letcher, U.S. Army, 57 pages.

The present state of tension between the United States and Iran signifies a failure of current and past diplomatic approaches to influence Iran. Curiously, the Islamic Revolution and the Iranian elections over the last decade indicate that support from Iranian women is essential to achieving domestic political objectives in Iran. It may be that women provide a path to influencing Iranian foreign policy.

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Introduction

For the past 25 years, the United States (U.S.) and the Islamic Republic of Iran have existed in a perpetual state of tension. This tension has several points of origin and the way toward peaceful resolution of this tension is not clear. In a recent survey of world public opinion, over 75 percent of those individuals surveyed in the U.S. viewed the people and government of Iran unfavorably.[1] Despite the mixed views on a woman's role in Iranian society, either traditional or modern, there is debate in the academic community over the influence that women have within an Islamic culture to affect change in society.[2] There appears to be a lack of understanding about the role of women in the domestic politics of Iran. In essence, there exists a neglected nexus of influence within Iran.

In 2002, in a now famous portion of his State of the Union Address, President Bush referred to Iran as a member of the axis of evil. Since then, the U.S. has waged a war against Iraq, engaged in multilateral diplomatic discussions with North Korea, but still has not engaged Iran in direct diplomatic discussions. Although the U.S. continues to conduct counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, some foreign policy experts contend that Iran stands as the greatest national security issue the U.S. currently faces. In fact, the 2006 *National Security Strategy of the United States* declares, "We face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran."[3] This political focus on Iran and the security threat it poses to the U.S. increases the

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[1]World Public Opinion.org, "Iranians and Americans Believe Islam and West Can Find Common Ground," 30 January 2007, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home_page/312.php?nid=&id=&pnt=312&lb=hmpg2 (accessed 7 May 2008).

[2]Iranian Studies Group, "Immigrant Iranian Women's Attitudes Towards Women's Status and Divorce: A Case Study in Queensland, Australia," http://isg-mit.org/research/?id=344&cat=iran&stat=full (accessed 9 May 2008).

[3]The White House. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), xx. http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf (accessed 9 May 2008).

need to understand the influential individuals, groups, and government offices within that country.

Unfortunately, since the Islamic revolution and the hostage crisis in 1980, American foreign policy and diplomatic efforts toward Iran have failed to relieve tensions between the two nations. After the 1979 revolution, the U.S. severed diplomatic ties to the Republic. Today, the U.S. communicates directly with Iran only in Baghdad over matters of regional security and its neighbor, Iraq.[4] Before the security discussions in Baghdad, the U.S. had no direct diplomatic contact with Iran.[5] After the Iranian revolutionaries seized the U.S. Embassy and held the staff hostage, the U.S. imposed economic sanctions against Iran. Those sanctions remain mostly unilateral and many major countries reject America's call to join those sanctions. The U.S. and some European political leaders have requested increasing sanctions and diplomatic distance from Iran because of their link to sponsored terrorism and violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.[6] However, this request is merely a continuation of the last thirty years of failed policy.

If unilateral economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation have not changed the course of U.S.-Iranian relations over the past thirty years, an alternate course may be in order to change the outcome. In fact, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright took much the same tack when she called the 1953 U.S.-backed coup overthrowing Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq as a mistake.[7] Unfortunately, the Clinton administration did not change considerably the tone of the

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[4]John Ward Anderson, "U.S., Iran Open Dialogue on Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 29 May 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/28/AR2007052800080.html (accessed 10 May 2008).

[5]Ibid.

[6]United States Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Energy and the Iranian Economy*: Hearing before the Joint Economic Committee, Testimony, Jeffrey J. Schott, 25 June 2006, http://www.iie.com/publications/papers/paper.cfm?ResearchID=649 (accessed 9 May 2008).

[7]Akbar Ganji, "The View from Tehran: Changing Iran from Within," *Boston Review* (May-June 2007), http://bostonreview.net/BR32.3/ganji.php (accessed 9 May 2008).

international discussion on Iran and actually codified the U.S. sanctions against Iran in the *Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996*.[8] The renewed militant stance of the Bush administration has moved the U.S. and Iran further away from diplomatic and economic cooperation. Unfortunately, this represents a move away from not towards productive diplomacy in the Middle East.

A cursory review of the literature reveals that over the past thirty years, Iranian women have found cleavages in society that have enabled them to achieve levels of power and influence within Iranian society and government. At first, it appears that Iranian women are unable to penetrate the domestic politics in Iran, but further examination reveals areas of domestic politics in which women have exerted power and influence. During the reign of Muhammed Reza Shah that ended in the Iranian Revolution and continuing through the theocratic rule of the Islamic Republic of Iran, women played significant roles in Iranian domestic politics. Although this paper stops short of offering a comprehensive strategy to motivate and focus the influence of women in Iranian domestic politics, it does serve to highlight the influence Iranian women have. Through additional research, it may be possible to identify how Iranian women influence policy decisions and how U.S. strategic communications might exploit their influence to advance U.S. security goals. Unfortunately, that research is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper focuses on determining when and how Iranian women are able to affect Iranian governmental policy decisions.

Before it is possible to explore the influence of women, it is first necessary to develop a clear understanding of influence. To determine if women have been politically significant within the domestic politics of Iran during the last thirty years, this study examines the historical role of women in the final years of the reign of the last Shah of Iran. The research also examines the Iranian Revolution and the current Islamic theocracy in Iran. That investigation sets a baseline

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[8]United States Congress.

from which to discuss the political system of Iran. The political development model created by Samuel Huntington's political development model in *Political Order in Changing Societies* provides a sound basis from which to analyze the history of Iranian politics. The model argues that two separate forces shape development in political systems, the modernizing and the traditional. Modern Iranian politics has been largely a struggle between modernizing and traditional political elements. It also studies how Muhammed Reza Shah tried and failed to negotiate a path to modernity. His failure led directly to the theocracy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

To understand Iranian politics and the role of women in Iranian political life, it is important to see Iranian politics as a struggle between modernizing and traditional political forces. In some sense that struggle is a search for identity. It is also necessary to understand how the structure of authority shapes who influences policies and how influence, as a concept, shapes the structure. Huntington suggests that there are four sources of support for modernization. These sources are the state bureaucracy, other groups, masses of the population, and foreign governments. This paper focuses on how the struggle between the modernizing and traditional political elements has affected women and the role that women have had in shaping the direction of Iranian domestic politics. The historical examination of Iran during the reign of the Shah and examples from the Islamic Republic of Iran highlights the challenges of a modernizing society. Women attempting to modernize and motivate change in Iranian polity stands as an example of a group that was able to find a political cleavages in society and exploit them to penetrate a convoluted system.

Gendered Political Forces in Iran

The last three decades of the twentieth century shows a dramatic shift in the roles of Iranian women. A review of the roles and rights of women in Iran helps to frame the political structure and environment today. Despite the passage of time, two things have remained constant:

the relationship between women and reform and the tension between the modern and traditional in Iranian domestic politics. "This tension has been an influential factor in political and cultural formation of Iranian society for the past 150 years."[9] Traditional political systems and societal roles are not limited to a specific type of government. Huntington discusses traditional political systems and the challenges of political modernization. Huntington defines traditional political systems as coming in "varied shapes and sizes: village democracies, city-states, tribal kingdoms, patrimonial states, feudal polities, absolute monarchies, bureaucratic empires, aristocracies, oligarchies, theocracies." To understand Iran and the influence of women in Iranian domestic politics, this research identified both the monarchy and the theocracy as traditional political forces faced with an internal modernizing force. Women comprise the modernizing force.

The terms traditional and modern have divided Iran culturally. Iranian political literature, at times, labeled Iranian women as both modern and traditional. Consequently, in Iranian politics, the changing fortunes of women trace the events in the struggle between traditional and modern. Attributing both modern and traditional values and impulses to one class of citizens, Iranian women, can lead to considerable confusion. Robert D. Lee addressed the term tradition in his book, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*. He defined tradition "to mean a lifestyle characteristic of an era before the advent of Europeans."[10] He also discusses the Islamic term, *turath*, which sometimes translates into tradition. In Islam, *turath* means the entirety of the Islamic experience.[11] For the purpose of this monograph, it is necessary to combine both meanings. Tradition is a lifestyle characteristic of an era before the advent of Europeans and encompasses the entirety of the Islamic experience. The second category is modernism. Ramin

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[9]Jahanbegloo, x.

[10]Robert D. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 5.

[11]Ibid., 6.

Jahanbegloo defines modernism in his book, *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, as "the desire for change and innovation, shaped by temporal conditions and national identity."[12]

As we follow women in the course of Iranian politics, their participation is closely linked to their identity, either modern or traditional. Identity refers to how an individual sees himself in political terms. In a modernizing country, political identities for most persons are likely the smallest unit of local government or local leaders.[13] Consequently, when this paper addresses the women's social movement, it will be necessary to return to the concept of identity.

The application of the terms modern and traditional to the domestic politics in Iran is important because the terms and their descriptions categorize people and motivate behavior that can affect policies. The Shah attempted to reduce the friction between traditional and modern by reforming the political and social environments of Iran. Initially, the Shah made two key changes to Iranian society: He restored the option for women to wear veils and the law that allowed clerics to veto parliamentary action. He intended to bridge the gap between modernity and traditionalism, but instead he further polarized the two groups.[14]

Several years later, the Shah's government established the High Council of Women, another of many steps towards the west and modernity. The council evolved into the Women's Organization of Iran. In 1962, female empowerment once again moved into the public arena when the government gave women the right to vote. The enfranchisement of women was opposed by many traditionalists, and, notably, by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Later in 1962, the

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[12]Jahanbegloo, 9.

[13] Joseph LaPalombara, *Politics Within Nations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1974), 46-7.

[14]Ibid., 197.

government repealed the law because there was little popular support for the measure. Then, almost a year later, the Shah reinstated the law as part of the "White Revolution."[15]

The "White Revolution" consisted of several major reforms. The "White Revolution" restored female suffrage, instituted land reform, and nationalized public lands. Private companies bought state-owned enterprises, education was reform, and non-Muslims served in public office. On whole, the traditional anti-western ideologues of Iran and the Ayatollah Khomeini found these reforms dangerous. They denounced the reforms shortly after implementation. Khomeini's actions resulted in house arrest for eight months. His arrest sparked massive anti-government riots. After his period of house arrest, Khomeini did not tone down his anti-Shah rhetoric, and the Shah eventually exiled him.[16]

After Khomeini's exile, the tensions between the traditional and modern within Iran did not fade. The modernists continued to push women's rights into the public debate, passing the Family Protection Law in 1967. The law legally secularized marriage and divorce in Iran and subjugated divorce proceedings, specifically child custody and spousal support, to the court. Moving family law into the secular court marked a tremendous shift away from Sharia law. Women gained a legal voice in the public sphere and the divorce rate in Iran decreased. Although the decrease corresponds with the enactment of the law, it may not have caused the decline. Although modernists saw this law positively, the law was not without its issues. Specifically, women's rights activists took issue with the legal provisions for the property rights of women after divorce. Their disappointment led to further friction between those in the government and society who thought that the law went too far or not far enough.

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[15]The Iran Chamber Society, "History of Iran: White Revolution--The Post-Mosaddeq Era and the Shah's White Revolution," http://www.iranchamber.com/history/white_revolution/white_revolution.php (accessed 9 May 2008).

[16]The Iran Chamber Society, "History of Iran: Ayatollah Khomeini," http://www.iranchamber. com/history/rkhomeini/ayatollah_khomeini.php (accessed 9 May 2008).

Advances such as the Family Protection Law led to women becoming more involved in the government. In 1968, Muhammad Reza selected the first women cabinet minister. This was an important step forward because it demonstrated to Iran that women were valued members of society and had a place in their government. The presence of a woman in the cabinet encouraged women to vote for women seeking public office. It created the impression that the women had a voice in government. Unfortunately, as with each step the Shah had Iran take towards modernity, these advancements collided with traditionalist rhetoric and anti-western fervor. As the 1960s progressed, the women the Shah had empowered increasingly found the Shah's alliance with the U.S. intolerable. "By the 1970s, some women working for gender equality were allied with a disliked government, while the opposition increasingly accepted the leadership of Khomeini, who opposed gender reform."[17]

However, the modern female in Iran felt that there were still changes necessary to reduce the restrictions placed on women and to protect them within Iranian society. In the 1970s, Iranian law restricted the liberty of women by requiring them to obtain male permission for travel, separate residence, and polygamy was still legal. One of the laws that women considered the most horrific was the legalization of honor killings. The law essentially sanctioned violence towards women by a family member.[18]

Despite opposition, the Shah continued his reform agenda. He named Mahnaz Afkhami the first minister of women's affairs in 1975. Unfortunately, this action, like others, angered the traditionalist forces in Iran and moved the two sides closer to conflict. Two of these major social changes included restriction on polygamy and the legalization of abortion. The modernists and feminists within the Iranian society and government believed the trend was toward greater reform

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[17]Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Middle East Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 112.

[18]Ibid., 111.

and these legal changes appeared to be a sign of progress. The feminists thought their participation was influencing their society and government. However, the Shah's reforms merely served to radicalize the traditionalist forces of Iran and increased the severity of the social backlash against these reforms.

That backlash manifested itself in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. There were multiple reasons, social and political, that Islamic traditionalists overthrew the Shah's monarchy: the poorly institutionalized political reforms, the large segments of the public rejected modernization, anti-western sentiment rose, and economic situation deteriorated. Through the lens of the feminist movement, the Islamic revolution offered a "nearly total ideological rupture."[19]

Khomeini and Shariati exploited the hostility toward the Shah's liberal gender reforms to maximize the opposition to the Shah. They did not discuss the issue in terms of equality but in terms of "Western imperialist influence."[20] Iranians viewed the Shah's modernization efforts as a threat to Islam. Shariati and Khomeini argued to the masses that Iran did not have to reject traditional Islam; rather a new concept of Islam could welcome "the technological advances of the modern world," while simultaneously rejecting "cultural and social reforms of modernity."[21] Through these ideas, he influenced young women to wear their traditional headscarves and to follow his sermons. In essence, the women of Iran that favored the traditional ideology donned their veils as symbols of that tradition, but soon thereafter, those veils came to symbolize the oppression of women in Iran.

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[19]Janet Afray, "Steering Between Scylla and Charybdis: Shifting Gender Roles in Twentieth-Century Iran," *NWSA Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996), http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=8&did= 9685942&SrchMode=3&sid=1&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=11 99378143&clientId=5094&aid=1 (accessed 3 January 2008).

[20]Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 74.

[21]Afray.

That oppression began quickly after the revolution took hold. The Islamic Revolution and the thirty years of theocratic rule in Iran repealed the Shah's major social reforms concerning the rights of women. The Islamic leaders adopted a "women in the home" gender ideology that superseded the modern laws during the reign of the Shah.[22] The Islamic concept of women in Iranian society limited the participation of women in public affairs--society, government, and others--thereby limiting their influence within Iran. "By all accounts, in the period directly after the revolution, women lost considerable ground in all spheres of Iranian social, political, and economic life."[23] Within two years, the new government of the Islamic Republic voided the Family Protection Law and systematically overturned the modern reforms of the Shah and moved to restrict the activities of Iranian women by restrictions on their dress, employment, and family rights. In accordance with the tenets of Islam, women were prohibited public contact with unrelated adult men and a male guardian needed to approve public legal and business transactions. Effectively, the Islamic Revolution removed women from many spheres of life and work.[24]

The result of the Islamic Revolution, in terms of gender equality, was a "drastic reversal of women's rights in all areas except suffrage and access to education."[25] It was not hard for the revolutionaries to sway the feminist movement after fifty years of struggle with the Pahlavi regime. They focused their appeal on those women who had benefited the least from the Shah's reforms and who still valued the traditional role of women: the veiled, peasant class. Peasant

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[22]Stephen C. Poulson, *Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Iran: Culture, Ideology, and Mobilizing Frameworks* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 274.

[23]Ibid., 276.

[24]Keddie, *Women in the Middle East,* 237.

[25]Afray.

women now had a voice in the theocratic Iran after their supposed oppression by the modernizing Shah and his Western or secular reform agenda.[26]

However, the support the Islamic Republic had from women, during and immediately after the revolution, is no longer prevalent in Iran. Iranian women now understand that the Islamic theocracy represses the female population. "Following the revolution, a series of regressions were imposed on women's rights in both the private and public realms."[27] Consequently, the women of Iran have been unable to change many of the Islamic republic's limitation on the liberties of women. Many women in Iran feel themselves cornered by their sex and the theocratic regime.

> On the one side is the antifeminist religious opposition offering women a degree of security and protection if they adhere to the strict code of conduct of the Muslim patriarchal culture but denying them their individual rights. On the other side are secular and authoritarian governments giving women a degree of economic and social equality yet denying everyone, including women, autonomous political and civil rights.[28]

This polarization of women's rights had put women, both modern and traditional, on opposing sides. These roles forced women to make personal choices about their role in their public and private lives.

Although the discourse about women's rights today is both internal and external to the state of Iran, the women of Iran have found themselves in a predicament before, during, and after the revolution. The predicament is the division between women and between modern and traditional values. Secular opposition leaders and advocates of women's rights within Iran and those outside poorly institutionalized Iran argue today for increased rights and the emancipation of the female population of Iran. The struggle by women for autonomy within Iran continues

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[26]Ibid.

[27]Azadeh Kian, "Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran: The Gender Conscious Drive to Change," *Bristish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no 1 (May 1997): 77.

[28]Afray.

while the political and cultural environment forces women to fight for rights they previously

enjoyed under the Shah. The fight today, however, requires not merely legal reforms. The

resistance is a movement that must plot a path that replaces Islamic Sharia law.

Iranian women have begun to find loopholes or footholds in Iran's political and legal

systems. Azadeh Kian notes, "While the civil code and the penal laws promote gender inequality,

men and women have equal political rights."[29] Kian's observation describes the dilemma that

Iranian women are struggling with in Iranian politics. Women of modernity worked to identify

the contradictions and ambiguities in Iran's constitution. They have begun to exploit the

contradictions to their advantage. According to Masha Sehkarloo, a member of the non-

governmental Women's Cultural Center in Tehran, "the constitution does not explicitly provide

for equality of rights between men and women."[30] Sehkarloo also states, "the Guardian Council

and other appointed bodies endowed with the power of official legal interpretation have

consistently propagated the concept of equity or "balance" of rights."[31] Contradictions must be

addressed and properly confronted to change policy.

In contrast, the ambiguities have led to new arguments that under the Iranian constitution

women have certain rights, one of those being the right to run for President of Iran. Although

women have identified contradictions in Iranian policy, feminist leaders have been unable to

influence the most important organization within the Islamic republic, the Guardian Council.

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[29]Kian, 78.

[30]Mahsa Shekarloo, "Iranian Women Take On the Constitution," *Middle East Report* (21 July 2005), http://www.merip.org/mero/mero072105.html (accessed 5 May 2008).

[31]Ibid.

Defining Influence in Iran

The events of the past sixty years trace the struggle between modernizing and traditional leaders and groups in Iranian society. History is a record of efforts to expand and to diminish the rights afforded women. However, to assess whether women participated effectively in advancing their own interest, it is essential to understand what the term influence means in the political and Iranian context. Influence is a difficult concept to define. A large body of academic research has sought to define influence. Thus, this paper addresses the important concept of influence before examining the ability of Iranian women to exert influence within the domestic political agenda of Iran.

Academic literature is replete with definitions and references to the term influence. The references differ in the actors involved, the relationships between the actors, and the structure of the relationships involved. Robert B. Cialdini defines influence as the "study of persuasion, compliance, and change."[32] He recognizes that influence is an instrument for motivating human behavior. According to his research, the relationship between actors influences the actions of others to achieve desired outcome. He provides multiple social and psychological strategies that change the dynamics of the relationship between actors. Cialdini's work compliments that of authors who concentrate on structural models of the formal and informal relationships between actors.

Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan define influence in *Power and Society* as relationship within social structures but they address the micro, as well as the macro, level of influence from the perspective of an individual actor. To begin with, Lasswell and Kaplan, acknowledge that influence is the ability "to affect the policies of others."[33] Both men go on to

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[32]Michael B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), vii.

[33]Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 83.

define influence as "the value position and potential of a person or group."[34] This political theory states that values are the desired goals and that value position is the outcome. In other words, influence is the sum of the place in society of the group or individual (actor), authority associated with that place and the likeliness of the outcome. Lasswell and Kaplan also choose to use the words power and influence interchangeably. They identify that there are some differences but "the most familiar base of influence and power is power itself: power over some values often constitute the condition for influence or power over other values."[35] In Iran, if women are influential, it is not because of their valued position but rather because of the influence or power they hold over other values.

Influence is not just about individuals but structures as well. Michael Taylor, in his article, "Influence Structures," describes a model of influence distribution "amongst a set of actors on the basis only of the influence structure, that is, the set of influence relations between the actors, and of attempts to define the degree to which the structure is hierarchised [SIC]."[36] This statement about the distribution of influence is the closest he gets to a true definition of influence. Taylor's design suggests that one definition may not provide a clear definition because the concept embraces a network of actors and energy within the system. Part of the challenge of understanding the pertinent areas in which women have exerted influence in Iranian domestic politics is appreciating the distribution of influence in Iranian government and society.

As Michael Taylor's structure describes, there is a distribution of influence among actors. That distribution shapes the relationships between actors, and the influence structure in an environment, or, in this case, Iranian domestic politics. Although Taylor does not address Iran, his design fits the Iranian polity because of his attention to the structure of influence can be

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[34]Ibid., 55.

[35]Ibid., 86.

[36]Michael Taylor, "Influence Structures," *Sociometry* 32, no 4 (December 1969): 490.

applied to describe Iranian politics. A woman (actor) in Iran may struggle to persuade other actors (men, the government bureaucracy, the Guardian Council, and others) based on a relationship structure that is limited by a social organization. There are also "concentrations of power that are divided into 'mutual influence sets.'" These sets influence either directly or indirectly by other units.[37] This is important in Iranian politics because of the distribution of power and influence in their government. The circles of influence in Iran do allow women different avenues in which to exercise influence. The same circles can decay or women can allow that ability to atrophy.

Influence is essentially a process. The definitions provided by Robert B. Cialdini, Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, compliment Michael Taylor's design. Influence is, at the micro level, an instrument for motivating human behavior. On the macro level, it is the ability to affect the policies of others. The difference among the various interpretations of influence lies in the distribution of power to each actor, relationship, or structure. This power or authority, as discussed by Michael Taylor, is both direct or indirect and formal or informal authority. This provides a description of the influence structure in terms of actors.

Academics that specialize in revolutions offer a slightly different perspective on influence. Misagh Parsa argues that the formal structures and processes within the polity create

the potential for revolution. Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan's definition of influence in relation to social structures is analogous to the third element of Michael Taylor's "Influence Structures." Parsa does not define influence in his book, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, but he does discuss the role of influence on the outcome of conflicts; rather, he states, "The structures and the processes exert influence on the outcome."[38] In other words, there

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[37]Ibid., 492.

[38]Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21.

is a link between the influence structure and social change. To put this in the context of this paper, Iranian women may influence a structure through social participation and this participation could lead to change in Iranian domestic politics.

This review of influence reveals the interrelated nature of influence and authority. Influence is a process based upon the power or authority of actors, the relationships between actors, and both the social and political structure of a polity. The ability to influence only resides in an actor who society views as valuable or perceives that they hold power or authority over valued things they seek. Although Islamic society publicly places less value on the influence and authority of women, women control valued elements within society, which means they have greater influence than first thought.

The Political System in Iran

The brief historical review of the political background of women's rights in Iran demonstrates the tensions between the traditional and the modern--the religious and the secular. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 created a new political system that distributed some authority throughout the bureaucratic structure of the government, but the bulk of power remained, as it had during the reign of the Shah, in the hands of a single person. After the revolution the true power in Iran was not the monarch, rather it was the Supreme Leader, the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iran is a traditional society that must interact, even minimally, with a modernizing global community. This strained interaction requires some modernization by the traditional political system. Samuel Huntington theorizes that in "a modernizing society policy innovation will vary more or less directly with the concentration of power in its political system." The ability of women to introduce change into the domestic politics of Iran is dependent on their ability to influence the concentrations of power in the Iranian political system. Applying Samuel Huntington's theory on political order in traditional societies to the current political environment

of Iran, reveals multiple circles of influence and multiple centers of power that in turn provide insight to the distribution of influence in the domestic politics of Iran.

James Q. Wilson influences a good deal of Samuel Huntington's theory. Wilson's political theory proposed, "That a political system where power was dispersed would have many proposals and few adoptions and one where power was concentrated would have few proposals but many adoptions."[39] Proposals and adoptions refer to policy innovation in a modernizing society. Huntington reviewed this and concluded that policy is about the concentration of power. To understand how this theory applies to Iran and the ability women have to influence the political process, there must first be a review of the current political organization in Iran.

Wilson's concept of power and his political theory suggest that a political system is comprised of numerous positions of power and that those in the positions of power would not present proposals, rather they would merely propose change in governmental structure. Iranian political structure exhibits these features. The struggle Iranian women have had trying to influence change in the domestic politics of the state is derived from the inertia of the structure. The institutions of the Iranian government display a large dispersion of power. The governing bodies represent elected institutions chosen by the people. However, the Guardian Council vets candidates to cull those who might not support the existing order. The constitution provides for appointed institutions chosen by the Assembly of Experts. Thus, despite a formal constitution, the workings of government are opaque. "The Iranian constitution provides an incomplete picture of the internal structure and decision-making processes of the Iranian government." Consequently, no one is certain where the power lies and whether women have the ability to influence policy.

The constitution of Iran divides government into three bodies or branches: the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. This structure is similar to the U.S. in name only. "Although radical

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[39]Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 141.

Islamists try to avoid following Western models, Western models do undoubtedly exercise some influence on them." The executive branch stifles change because the ultimate decision-making power rests in the hands of one man--the Supreme Leader. Consequently, the locus of Iranian power resides in the Executive Branch and, therefore, this paper must focus primarily on that branch.
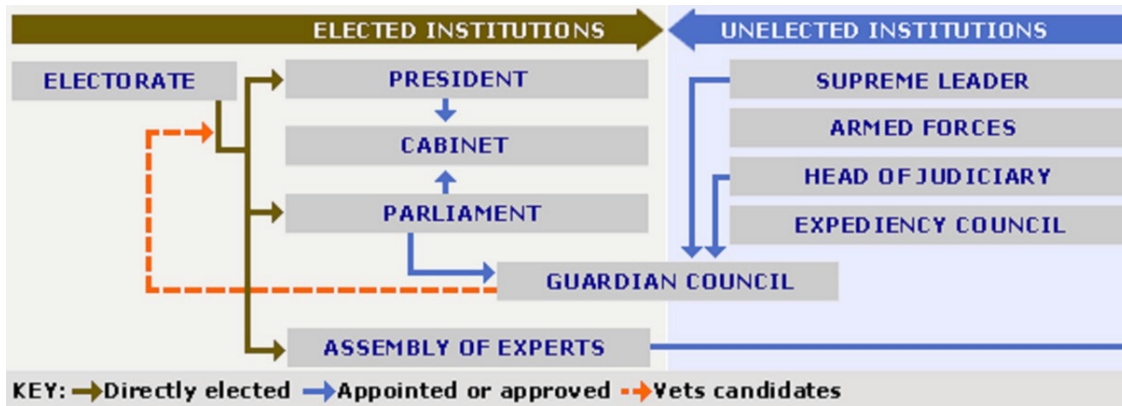

Figure 1.   Iran's Complex Political System
Source: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "Iran: Who Holds the Power? Iran's Complex Political System," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/iran_power/html/default.stm (accessed 9 May 2008).

The Chief of State, the Supreme Leader is currently Ali Hoseini-Khamenei, who leads the Executive Branch. Ayatollah Khamenei has been in power since the death of the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. In addition to the Chief of State, the head of government is the President, Mahmud Ahmadinejad. President Mahmud Ahmadinejad has been in office since 3 August 2005. There is also a Council of Ministers (similar to a presidential cabinet) over which the President and Supreme Leader have a measure of control. Additionally, three groups have responsibilities within the government of Iran: the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Council.

The Assembly of Experts is an elected body of eighty-six religious scholars and is constitutionally responsible for electing, supervising, and dismissing the Supreme Leader and the

Expediency Council. Aside from its role in the election process, the assembly remains a mystery. Several criticisms of the assembly point to its secrecy and lack of accountability to the populace of Iran.

The Guardian Council is a 12-member board made up of six clerics chosen by the Supreme Leader and six jurists selected by the Majles (Iranian Parliament). The Majles selects the board from a list of candidates recommended by the judiciary, the leader of which the Supreme Leader appoints to a six-year term. This Council determines whether proposed legislation is both constitutional and faithful to Islamic law, vets candidates for suitability, and supervises national elections. The Supreme Leader appoints the clerical members of the Guardian Council that serve as permanent members of that organization for five terms. There are temporary members, including Cabinet members and Majles committee chairs selected when issues under their jurisdiction come before the Expediency Council.

The Expediency Council exerts supervisory authority over the executive, judicial, and legislative branches and resolves legislative issues on which the Majles and the Council of Guardians disagree. Since 1989, the council has advised national religious leaders on matters of national policy. In 2005, the Council's powers expanded, at least on paper, to act as a supervisory body for the government. The Expediency Council rarely passes legislation related to women's issues. In January of 2008, Dr. Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, former Iranian legislator spoke to students at UCLA and explained that, "When I was in Parliament, more than 98 percent of any bills related to women's issues were rejected by the Guardian Council."[40] This observation highlights the direct authority the council has over domestic policy in Iran.

Power is concentrated in Iran's political system. Huntington's development model focuses on modernizing societies, societies such as Iran, and postulates that a state's ability to

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[40]Kevin Matthews, "The 98 Percent Strategy," *The UCLA International Institute* (16 January 2008), http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=85492 (accessed 10 May 2008).

innovate rests on the available power within the political system. To influence that state's

political system, as Lasswell and Kaplan suggested, a group must influence the power base of the

state. If women in Iran are to succeed in influencing the domestic political environment, then they

must influence the seat of Iranian power--the Supreme Leader, Guardian Council, and the

Expediency Council. Women must find a way to exert influence if they intend to "overthrow the

traditional interests." However, influencing the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader is not

an easy task because both shroud themselves in mystery and a labyrinth of relationships.

The domestic political establishment of Iran is a maze of authority with multiple layers

and centers of power. The political structure lends itself to analysis and depiction as multiple

circles surrounding a core. The boundaries of those circles are, at times, more porous and ill

defined than a one-dimensional figure could depict (see figure 2). The center of the circle, around

which the government of Iran orbits, is the Supreme Leader. The "inner workings of Iran's

leadership" comprises the inner circle. Outside the Supreme Leader, women in Iran remain

unsure who has the authority and the power to produce change. The opaque character of Iranian

government makes it difficult for any group to identify the loci of power. This problem is an

obstacle whenever women in Iran attempt to change laws unfavorable to women. For example,

between 2000 and 2004, "33 bills addressing gender issues were introduced by female legislators,

the Guardian Council rejected all of them."[41] Women come together and work to pass legislation

in an area where they have representation-the Parliament. Often laws pass but fail to gain

approval by the Guardian Council. This example also supports Wilson's observation about the

dispersion of power; there are many proposals and few adoptions. Determining who holds what

power for which issue is the problem. There are unique rules inside the Iranian circles and very

few know those rules and few can alter or change them.

Influential committees, including the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council, and the

Council of Experts, comprise the next circle. It is unclear as to their level of influence on the

Supreme Leader. Although the inner workings of the executive branch are secretive, it is a given

that the Supreme Leader holds great sway over these committees since he plays an integral role in

nominating committee members. Outside of that circle is the next level of influencers: the

president, the leaders of the armed forces, the parliament, and senior clerics. Additional members

of that circle might include certain elected officials. "Well-connected merchants, militia members

and millions of volunteers who make up the government's shock troops"[42] comprise the outer

ring.

[41]Bill Samii, "Analysis: Despite Short-term Reversals, Iranian Women's Status Likely To Improve," *Radio Free Europe* (11 February 2005), http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/02/cba8f457-d6ca-478d-ade8-f42fbf94d05f.html (accessed 9 May 2008).

[42]Borzou Daragahi, "Iran's Inner and Outer Circles of Influence and Power," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 2007, http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-circle31dec31,1,6012308.story (accessed 10 May 2008).
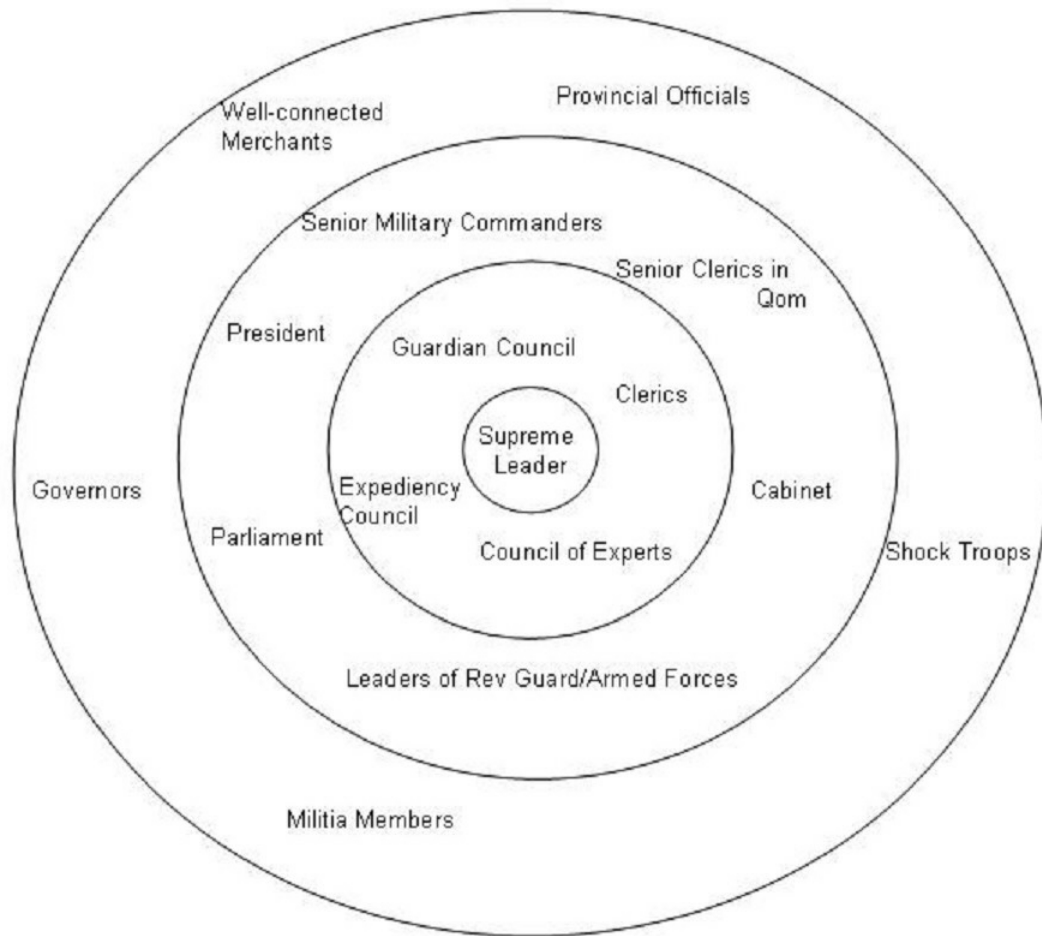
Figure 2.   Circles of Influence and Iranian Politics

Iran is a traditional society that struggles with the tensions between modernity, and the pull of its religious ideology. To understand this internal struggle within Iran, it is necessary to identify the sources of support that are necessary to modernize a traditional society.

Sources of Support

To modernize a society, there must be some level of support from a variety of sources. Samuel Huntington focuses on four sources of support for a modernizing a traditional society: the state bureaucracy, other groups, masses of the population, and finally foreign governments. This monograph will not address foreign governments. This monograph examines the internal

influence of women within Iran on domestic politics. It appears feasible to address the need for

support from the same sources for policy to change within a theocracy as well. The ability of

women to change policy and influence domestic politics rests in their ability to gain support

among the state bureaucracy, other groups, and the general population. Iranian women are able to

modify policy through support from some member of the state bureaucracy. Some women are

able to penetrate the circle of influence by becoming active in the state bureaucracy through the

role of the public servant, working to pass legislation, and participation in the election process.

Other groups include well-connected merchants and women's organizations. The general

population includes interest groups and mobilizes through the media, the press, and social

movements.

State Bureaucracy

According to Samuel Huntington, a society's ability to innovate policy is dependent on

the concentration of power in the political system. Extending Wilson's theory in this context

means, the concentration of power equates to the amount of change in the society. The more

dispersed the power, the less policy innovation. Both of these concepts hold true in Iran when

referring to the influence of women in domestic politics. The circles of influence demonstrated

the levels of power and their connection to the Supreme Leader. Women in Iran have their power

and influence dispersed among the traditional and the modern. Power is also dispersed elsewhere

in the Iranian political system so that the many proposals for change made by women result in

few actual adoptions. It appears that Iranian women must penetrate many circles of power to

influence domestic politics.

In Huntington's model of a modernizing monarchy, support from the state bureaucracy is

vital.[43] To administer the new policies and conduct the business of governance, the monarch must

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[43]Huntington, 162.

bring like-minded individuals into the offices and bureaus. Some of the new government administrators were not drawn from the aristocracy, but they, nevertheless, will be entrusted with positions of power. Expanding access to government positions allows creation of a greater base of support with which to achieve policy innovation. Although there is limited evidence from which to draw a correlation between the influence of women and the state bureaucracy, there appears to be some connection between policy change and the role of Iranian women as public servants and voters. To gain support for liberalization of policies of concern to women from the state bureaucracy, women need to become public servants, to work to pass legislation, and to participate in the election process.

Women may serve in many elected positions but not run for the Presidency in Iran. After the Islamic Revolution, women began to emerge as public servants in all levels of government from village communities to seats in the parliament. Initially, the women who served in the first three Majlis (parliaments) were mostly from well-established religious families. However, as participation increased, so did the diversity of backgrounds of the candidates.[44] Women influenced policy by presenting motions, by actively gaining support for bills, by providing a different interpretation of Islam and Islamic laws and establishing active caucuses. Although they struggled to mobilize, the women serving in public office were able to influence men and women.

In the first three parliaments following the Islamic Revolution, women held 1.5 percent of the seats. That was a small proportion, but it did provide women access to men and an opportunity to represent women in the work of the Parliament. According to one member, Mrs. Rajayi, after presenting a motion in reference to women, the women in the parliament would "first talk and persuade every single male member." One example she states was a motion to assist widows. Although she and her female counterparts influenced each male individually, once they were in an open forum, the men voted against the assistance, even though they had agreed in

private to support the motion.[45] It is arguable that the women had been unable to influence the passage of widows' assistance motion, but in the Fourth Majlis, the motion passed. The women attribute their success to their work and influence through time.

The Fifth Majles has the largest number of women in Iranian history. Women held 4 percent of the seats, which was a significant increase from the previous Majles. Four percent equated to 14 out of 270 seats. In 2000, voters elected thirteen women to positions in Parliament and in 2004; the representation of women in the Iranian Parliament declined to nine women. The Guardian Council had disqualified 49 percent of the women who had stood as candidates. In response to election bans handed down by the Guardian Council, candidates removed themselves in the 2004 elections. Over 100 women resigned together to fight this injustice in an attempt to influence their government.[46] This did not prove to be a successful measure and decreased the number of women serving and representing the Iranian Parliament.

Although the widows' motion passed Parliament, like most women's rights bills, it failed to pass the Guardian Council.[47] It is possible for issues advanced by female parliamentarians, such as marital age, divorce, polygamy, and child custody to advance through the elected governmental bodies, but the Guardian Council continually holds up the resolution.[48] The council leans on their interpretation of Islam as justification for restricting women's rights in Iran. It is arguable that women fail to influence the government effectively because they are unable to affect decisions made by the Guardian Council.

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[44]Kian, 82.

[45]Shekarloo.

[46]Shadi Sadr, "Women's Gains at Risk in Iran's New Parliament," *WeNews* (8 June 2004), http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/archives/04_0608_iran_wip.htm (accessed 7 January 2008).

[47]Ibid.

[48]Shekarloo.

Women were able to penetrate other public service positions in Iran. In August of 2000, the Iranian Minister of Interior appointed the first female governor since the revolution. Rahmat Ruhani Sarvestani currently serves as the Governor of Sarvestan. This is important because it demonstrates that women can hold executive positions in the provinces. In 2004, a large number of disqualified candidates for the Seventh Majles resulted in a protest by reformist deputies that resulted in provincial governors addressing the issue with the Guardian Council. The provincial governors issued an ultimatum, "if the decisions were not retracted within ten days, they would resign en masse, effectively nixing any chance the elections could be held." The result was the Guardians were required to provide "convincing reasons" to disqualify a candidate.[49] The role of the governorship proved to have an influential nature with the Guardian Council.

Iranian election laws do not formally exclude women from elective positions. Inequality, nonetheless, exists in Iranian election laws because women candidates are disqualified from competing for various posts to include the presidency. The Guardian Council is able to vet the candidates and exclude them at will. Since the Islamic jurists hold the ultimate power, they have the final say in the candidates. In 2005, "89 women registered their candidacy, but none were approved. The Guardian Council interprets the criteria that presidential candidates be "religious or political personalities" to exclude women categorically."[50] These discriminatory practices limit the ability of women to influence the Guardian Council and truly elect a candidate that can represent and influence change in domestic politics.

On the surface, the Guardian Council is the most influential body in Iran yet provides minimal support for the legislation supporting modernization. The Council appoints and approves candidates, and has arbitrary powers. However, the Council discriminates against women through

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[49]Morad Saghafi and Kaveh Ehsani, "The New Landscape of Iranian Politics," *Middle East Report* no. 233 (Winter 2004): 3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1559446.pdf (accessed 10 May 2008).

[50]Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Clerical Leaders Foreclose Free Elections," *Human Rights News* (12 June 2005), http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2005/06/12/iran11114.htm (accessed 5 May 2008).

limiting the positions they could be elected to and continues to block bills that would allow

greater freedom for women in Iran The inability of women to gain equality in Iran ties directly to

their inability to influence the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council's responsibility is to

interpret the constitution and ensure laws and government polices are consistent with Islamic

Law. The Council uses its power of interpretation to maintain the inequalities in Iran towards

women.

There is one more body, the Expediency Council or the Council for the Discernment of

Expediency, and they have the final say in legislative matters that come into dispute between the

Parliament and the Guardian Council. Iranian women may have some indirect influence on the

Expediency Council through other groups. Female legislators and elected members of the

Assembly of Experts have access to the members of the Assembly of Experts but that access does

not easily become influence.

One tool of influence that is available to women is the vote. Women participate in the

election process as both voters and legislators; they establish caucuses, push through legislation,

and speak before Parliament. "Women in Iran are allowed to vote at the age of 15. They hold 4

percent of the seats in Parliament, and more than half of the university students are women."[51]

There appears to be some level of success in gaining access to their government, so why is

woman's emancipation still not a reality? The answer to this question is not rooted in their active

participation but answered by the role of the Guardian Council, The Expediency Council, the

Council of Experts, and the Clerics that surround the Supreme Leader.

Women influenced the creation of Islamic Republic of Iran through the vote. Ayatollah

Khomeini recognized the importance of women in the revolution when he preached a sermon to a

group of women in Qum during which he said, "All you (women) should vote. Vote for the

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[51]Diane Sawyer, "You Can't Judge an Iranian Women by Her Cover," *ABC News* (12 February 2007), http://www.learningpartnership.org/en/news/press/021207iran (accessed 7 January 2008).

Islamic Republic. Not a word less, not a word more. . . . You have priority over men."[52] The

influence women had over the Islamic Revolution was massive and the leaders of the movement

acknowledged their power and successfully mobilized it. "The government reported an

overwhelming majority of more than 98% in favor of the Islamic Republic."[53] There is reason to

doubt this statistic because it comes from a government source, there was a lack of choices, and

the ballot was not secret. The Iranian electorate faced with only one option, to either accept or

reject the Islamic Republic of Iran and the choice had to be public. Nevertheless, even if the

voting was not entirely representative of public sentiments, the election process found it

important to mobilize women and urge them to exercise a voice, an influence, in their

government.

Elections since the referendum on the Islamic Republic are excellent examples of the

influence women have on the Iranian government. After the 1997 Iranian Presidential elections,

Mahsa Shekarloo observed that the emergence of women "as a formidable voting bloc served as a

precursor to their rapid and often politically charged entry into the public sphere."[54] There is

limited statistical proof to validate the level of influence women have over the elected positions in

Iran; however, there is a perception that motivates leaders to target them as a voting bloc.

Iranian women struggle to influence the state bureaucracy directly. Their ability to serve

as public servants and influence is minimal at best according to the research available. Passing

legislation has proved to be at a standstill with approximately a 2 percent success rate in altering

the domestic politics of Iran through the Guardian Council or the Expediency Council.[55] Women

have proved that they are a formidable voting bloc but due to insufficient evidence, it is not

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[52]Kian, 77.

[53]The Iran Chamber Society, "History of Iran: Iran After the Victory of 1979's Revolution," http://www.iranchamber.com/history/islamic_revolution/revolution_and_iran_after1979_2.php (accessed 6 May 2008).

[54]Shekarloo.

possible to prove the accuracy of that statement. There is inclusive evidence, at best, to prove that women are able to gain the support of the state bureaucracy.

Other Groups

The Iranian political system seem impenetrable but because power is divided among a number of legislative and executive bodies there may be other segments of society that hold direct and indirect authority in Iranian polity. For example, merchants have always been a politically significant group; some well-connected merchants may have authority to influence decision on domestic matters. Samuel Huntington discusses "other groups" as another form of support to modernize.[56] Well-connected merchants and women's organizations, both modern and traditional, are groups that lend their support to change policy in Iran. There is further proof that in the areas where women have had poor success directly, women may be able to accomplish success indirectly by influencing those elements that do. This section will attempt to draw a linkage between women and "other groups" starting with the outer circle of influence.

In the early months of 2007, the Supreme Leader "ordered his deputies to start privatizing state-owned businesses." He ordered them to conduct this action quickly and nine months later, "only two out of 240 state-owned businesses Khamenehei targeted had been sold off."[57] This dichotomy presents erosion between the influence of the Supreme Leader and the well-connected merchants in the outer circle of influence. This failure suggests that there are limits to influence of the Supreme Leader when dealing with businesses and the well-connected merchants that manage them in the outer circle of influence. To begin with, well-connected merchants are wealthy, pro-regime, bazaari class members. "Bazaars in Iran are not only trade centers but also

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[55]Matthews.

[56]Huntington, 163.

centers of political and social interactions."[58] The bazaari classes, merchants, have been involved in all the revolutions in the last hundred years. The well-connected merchants are leaders in this class due to their economic standing and affiliation with the regime. Stephen Poulson in his research on social movements in Iran observed, "Social structures usually organized according to mobilizing structures and political opportunities."[59] The bazaar identifies with mobilizing structures, and his research demonstrated that religious elites identify with political opportunities. Poulson also noted that political opportunities could belong to a number of groups. Political opportunity is "a structural change that makes the probability of a movement mobilization greater."[60] An example he provides is an economic crisis. "Social movements also "make" opportunities and "create" change to a system by challenging it."[61] "During an economic or political crisis, these hierarchal organizations have been recognized by defenders of traditional economic, social, and political systems. Bazaaris are an important economic power, but also an important political and social power, as witnessed by their influence on the political and social movements in many cities."[62]

The bazaar has always played an important role in mobilizing the people. Bazaars close in response to increase crowd activity. In July of 1998, students organized in twelve to eighteen cities to protest the denial of basic democratic rights. "The Committee in Defense of the Democratic Freedoms in Iran (CDDFI) has been organized to build the broadest grassroots

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[57]Borzou Daragahi, "The Power of Shiite Muslim Clergy Has Eroded in Iran," *Iran Press Service* (4 January 2008), http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2008/january-2008/the-power-of-shiite-muslim-clergy-has-eroded-in-ir.shtml (accessed 5 May 2008).

[58]Mehmet Ufuk Tutan, "Bazaaris' Interests on the Iranian Economy: A Coalition with Ulama," *Ege Academic Review* 8, no. 1 (2008), http://www.eab.ege.edu.tr/pdf/8_1/C8-S1-M14.pdf (accessed 5 May 2008).

[59]Poulson, 9.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid., 11.

[62]Mehmet Ufuk Tutan.

support among the organizations of students, workers, women, oppressed nationalities, and others." In the city of Tabriz, the bazaar closed in response to the protest. Some bazaars close in support, some in reaction.[63] Either way, a mobilized effort negatively affects the commerce and the bazaari class.

In addition to mobilizing structures, Poulson also states that the dominant social structures of Iranian society are the mosque and the bazaar. It is at these locations that people have the ability to mobilize. Women have also found mobilizing structures in social and political establishments through media outlets. Iranian women communicated through print media: books, journals, newspapers, the cinema, and the Internet. Public expression has traditionally been a challenge for Iranian women and continues to be a challenge today.

Prior to the revolution, Reza Shah encouraged women to participate in the public realm and empowered women to participate in the arts and education but "censorship, high production costs, and inadequate and irrational systems of distribution" stifled progress. As the Islamic Revolution unfolded, so did a cultural revolution that was short-lived due to the same issues faced earlier by the monarchy. As time progressed, so did cultural and economic challenges to publication for women.[64] Despite the challenges, women moved forward to express themselves through written communication and film.

In 1980, the government established and controlled the first women's newspaper and the women's journal. Mahbubeh Ummi, an editor said, "Although secular women do not share our convictions, we can collaborate because we all work to promote women's status." The print media gave women from secular and modernist backgrounds a common platform for influencing women in Iran. The more the print media exercised the freedom of the press, the more the Iranian

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[63]Kamran Nayeri, "Student Protest in Iran," *Socialist Action* (December 1999), http://www.socialistaction.org/news/199912/persia.html (accessed 9 May 2008).

[64]Sussan Siavoshi, "Cultural Politics and the Islamic Republic: Cinema and Book Publication," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no 4 (November 1997): 519-20.

government restricted those rights. Women had found a medium in which they could organize and share common and contrary beliefs. Contrary beliefs, even from women, eventually caused a set back in written expression in Iran.

The Fifth Majles had the greatest number of women serving, yet the Majles appears to have diminished women's rights in Iran. The Women's Commission under that Parliament proposed a bill to prevent the press from printing stories on women and thereby, stop the public debate on women's rights. The law passed but never implemented due to public unrest.[65]

The 1997 Presidential elections, influenced by women, ignited positive changes for women in Iran. According to BBC, "More than 60% of the votes that brought Mohammad Khatami to power in 1997 came from women."[66] In turn, it "brought about a reformist movement and a free press, which tried, against intense and sometimes violent opposition from part of the clerical establishment, to democratize the Islamic republic."[67] The Reformist Movement increased the freedom to communicate through the media and that allowed Iranian women alternative forms of communication with Iranian society.

The print media provides writers, lawyers, and activists a means to reach traditional and modern women. Printed outlets are magazines, journals, newspapers, books, and music. "Literature became a particularly important medium for women's self-expression because public space for discussion and debate was extremely limited." There are scores of journals dedicated to women's issues in Iran. Women write about social and private issues to include women's issues, women's lives in the past, women's poverty, patriarchy, criticism of marriage traditions, and

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[65]Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Rise and the Fall of Fa'ezeh Hashemi: Women in the Iranian Elections," *Middle East Report* no 218 (Spring 2001), 9.

[66]Massoumeh Torfeh, "Iranian Women Crucial in Majlis Election," *BBC News* (30 January 2008), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7215272.stm (accessed 3 January 2008).

[67]Mir-Hosseini, "The Rise and the Fall of Fa'ezeh Hashemi," 8.

feminist-oriented politics.[68] Women do have a more difficult time publishing than men but have found an audience in other women. Publishing houses are government-owned and the result is discrimination in publication choices.[69] Although the freedom of the press is controversial, women have embraced it as a means for discourse with women in Iran.

Iranian cinema and television provides a venue through which to influence Iranian society. As with other media outlets, the government of Iran is financially involved in the industry. "Women and their representation on the screen were major sources of contention, causing filmmakers immediately after the revolution to ignore women all together." This began to change in the 1980s, when women became major characters on camera and behind the scenes.[70] Their increased presence allowed women to play a more influential role in the production of films. The result has been an increase in movies that not only address the tensions in a society but also a critique of Iran.[71] Similar to the print media, constraints on the industry have constrained the message of the group.

The Internet as a mode of influence and communication is growing in Iran. Segregation laws have made it difficult for women to use the Internet through Internet cafés. In May 2007, Iran opened its first and only Internet café for women.[72] The government responded and slowed the expansion of Internet access to reduce its use by Iranians. The government of Iran wants to limit Western influence. The government has banned the use of the Internet in Iranian homes.[73]

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[68]Kamran Talattof, "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-Revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-Revolutionary Feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies 29, no. 4* (November 1997): 543.

[69]Siavoshi, 521.

[70]Hamid Naficy, "Iranian Cinema under the Islamic Republic," *American Anthropoligist, New Series* 97, no. 3 (September 1995): 550.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Reuters.com, "Iran Starts its First Woman-Only Internet Café," 21 May 2007, http://www.reuters.com/article/lifestyleMolt/idUSL2164396120070521 (accessed 3 January 2008).

[73]Kimia Sanati, "Media-Iran: Policing of Internet Will Continue," *Inter Press Service* (27 November 2006), http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35609 (accessed 3 January 2008).

This restriction along with government filtering reduces the Internet's ability to serve as a tool by which to influence policy and opinion.

Iranian women successfully communicate with the people of the Islamic republic through indirect sources. Although there is little evidence to demonstrate a relationship between the women's movement and the bazaari class, there is significant evidence to prove a relationship with the media, and cinema. Despite restrictions and guidelines placed upon the society, women have been able to move forward and into the public through communication mediums.

Masses of the Population

Samuel Huntington discusses a third "potential" source of support for modernization. This support comes from the masses or mobilized support. In a modernizing nation, the term masses usually refer to the common people, peasants or workers, the group that is mobilized.[74] When it comes to women in Iran, the term applied to the unorganized population of women, both modern and traditional. Huntington proposes four problems associated with the rising of the masses. Mobilized elements may be extreme in their opposition to the regime. They may take matters into their own hands. They are difficult to organize, and the members may hold differing goals. Although Huntington referred to the masses as a group that the modernizing monarch or another force might mobilize to support governmental reforms, the term as used here is more broadly applicable to groups of people to mobilize, to influence domestic politics.

Modernizing forces must develop a strategy for mobilizing support. One way that broad disaffected groups have accomplished this in Iran is through coming together to protest through inaction, such as boycotts. In 2004, the Islamic Participation Front supported boycotting the

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[74]Huntington, 164.

elections in protest.[75] Women fighting for reform in Iran made a choice not to vote because they did not believe in the Islamic Republic nor did they choose to support a system in which they did not share in the authority. In 2005, the Islamic Iran Participation Front, once again, decided to withhold support from all the candidates in the presidential election and supported women staying away from the polls.[76] Consequently, this action resulted in the election of a candidate that supported a conservative rather than reformist approach to social change in Iran.

The Islamic Participation Front, among other women's rights groups, decided to mobilize the masses and, by taking matters into their own hands, they made a decision to mobilize people not to vote. By failing to participate in the Presidential election, women not only failed to attain their policy goal but also elected a new leader. This is relevant because women clearly influenced the outcome, albeit not as intended, by choosing not to participate. Withholding votes equated to approving a radical shift in the presidency. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the new President of Iran and brought to a halt social reform for modern women. One of Ahmadinejad s first acts in office was to change the name of the Center for Women's Participation to the Center for Women and Family Affairs. The President chose a new leader, Nasrin Soltankhah, and she vowed not to change any of the current rights of women and issued guidance limiting women's work outside the home.[77] This opposition created near-term conditions that were in polar opposition to the intent of the mobilization and led to a candidate that challenged the very reform the mobilized masses were aiming to achieve in their protest.

The decision not to vote was an example of mobilization or mass action, but Huntington recognized that mass action is difficult to channel in a positive direction. After much deliberation,

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[75]Miranda Eeles, "Iran's Disappointed Women," *BBC News* (19 February 2004), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/ middle_east/3500565.stm (accessed 10 May 2008).

[76]Shekarloo.

[77]Ibid.

women redirected their strategy and have come to realize that the main obstacle to an improved women's status is the very nature of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is another problem that Huntington warns against: differing goals. Instead of voting, women chose to "advance a gendered critique of the constitution."[78] They chose to change their objective. Instead of aiming for a change in political leaders, they chose to affect domestic politics by changing the interpretation of the constitution. According to a Middle East Report Online by Mahsa Shekarloo, women had mobilized to protest a constitution that did not provide equal rights for women. Women's rights activists, secular, religious, and government-affiliated women, came to the collective conclusion that the "Islamic Republic's constitution is the main obstacle to their concerted efforts to improve women's legal status. The constitution does not explicitly provide for equal rights for men and women."[79] Women have attempted to interpret Islamic law in ways that encourage equality. This action proved successful for reformists. Women have come together from various backgrounds to speak up, protest, sit-in, and gather support to mobilize change. Women's activism in Iran has had two goals: "increasing women's collective social participation and achieving equal legal rights."[80] Once the goals were identified and articulated, the movement focused on mobilizing the masses of women. The collective social participation has had success in mobilizing women's groups. In 2006, according to Elah Koolaee, a professor of political science at Tehran University, reformists mobilized more than twenty-five groups into one alliance to support election causes.[81] Although the groups accomplished their goal to block support, there is little proof that their actions amounted to more than a public statement. However, the presence of the election boycott is evidence that women mobilized to champion an issue.

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[78]Ibid.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Torfeh.

The ability to pull groups into alliance with other groups appears to provide some indication that women have the ability to influence their society through organizations. Huntington warns that is difficult to organize the masses. An organization is a "group of people that is structured to pursue goals that are collectively identified."[82] This definition shadows Huntington's warning of the difficulty of mobilization due to the differing goals and motivations of different leaders and groups of people. Iranian women motivate broad participation through social movements and non-governmental organizations to influence Iranian society. Women, through demonstrations, protests, publications, and boycotts have influenced change in Iranian society.

The women's social movement shifted from political to social. A social movement historically requires both organization and impulsiveness. Certain organizations in Iran proved capable of producing both. The Reformist Movement in the 1990s "provided a space for women to study, organize, develop a gender analysis and create a vocabulary of resistance."[83] Characteristically, organization and people come together and as the movement gains momentum, the movement must develop "identity, leadership, and coordination to the movement, but the boundaries of the movement are never coterminous with the organizations."[84] The ability to manage organization and mobilization were a shortfall in the efforts to promote social change for women in Iran during the Reformist Era.

Although the strategy may have developed slowly, women have partially succeeded in establishing an identity, in mobilizing sympathetic followers, and in developing a leadership to gain broad participation and influence change in Iran. On 12 June 2005, a diverse group of

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[82]Patricia Yancey Martin, "Rethinking Feminist Organizations," *Gender and Society* 4, no. 2, (June 1990): 185.

[83]Shekarloo.

[84]Britannica, "Social Movement," http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106255/social-movement (accessed 8 May 2008).

women from the women's movement came together to participate in a sit-in. They mobilized over 2,000 Iranian women from 90 different groups and protested the constitution's denial of women's rights. Women also turned to what they saw as their leadership, the four female deputies from the first Majles: Maryam Behruzi, Gohar ol-Shareh Dastgheib, A'zam Taleqani, and A'tefeh Rajai.[85] The result was "modest improvements for women."[86] These improvements came in the areas of child custody and divorce arrangement. This ability to influence change within the domestic polity of Iran motivated the women's movement to over the last thirty years and continues to serve as the driving force behind their mobilization.

Over the past thirty years, the identity of the women in the women's movement in Iran has shifted as women have been mobilized to influence change in different areas of Iranian society and government. Specifically, the self-identification of women in the women's movements has shifted relative to the issue at hand in regard to the different spheres of Iranian society: class, education, religion, and roles. There are competing identities for women, and Islam has served as a unifying identity for many of the women as they mobilize themselves. "The literature from the Middle East makes clear that in many parts of the world where Islamic movements are on the rise, women find themselves torn between their identity as a woman and their cultural identity as Muslims."[87] During the Iranian revolution, women, traditional or secular, were able to intertwine their roles, traditional or secular, and adopt the veil as a common symbol for different causes. Iranian women were able to identify with the veil despite their modern or tradition beliefs. The outcome had both positive and negative results for women

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[85]All four of these were elected from Tehran and were deemed by the Supreme Leader to lack higher education but acceptable for office based on their knowledge of the Quran and religious matters. Elham Gheytanchi, "Appendix: Chronology of Events Regarding Women in Iran since the Revolution of 1979," *Social Research* (Summer 2000), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2267/is_2_67/ai_63787338 (accessed 8 May 2008).

[86]Shekarloo.

[87]R. Ray and A. C. Korteweg, "Women's Movements in the Third World: Identity, Mobilization, and Autonomy," *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 25 (1999): 51.

generally. Traditional women witnessed powerful social change that reinforced their religious and social beliefs. Secular and modern women witnessed setbacks, resulting from the reintroduction of traditional social norms. Despite the differing social views about change among women, women's groups organized the masses of women into social movement to influence domestic Iran through social movements. These women's groups were able to mobilize the female population of Iran through the views that the Iranian women held of themselves--their self-identity.

Identities are important for mobilizing broad participation. Mobilization of women for the women's movement was a success. According to Ali Akbar Mahdi, a specialist in the political economy of change, gender, race, and development in the Middle East, "The past dependency of women's activism on male organization has been replaced by a highly confident attitude and determination to fight this battle for women's rights by women themselves."[88] Prior to the Islamic Revolution, Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini did an excellent job motivating women to be part of their movement. Their supporters were able to mobilize traditional women using religiously based rituals and messages glorifying women. Khomeini's mobilization of the traditional women even served to mobilize the secular women because they viewed the massive resistance to the Shah as building female solidarity.[89] Identities form from interests and interests compel women to mobilize. R. Ray and C. Korteweg outline the preconditions for mobilization. The interests and identities form within a social or political structure. These structures bring women together to facilitate the preconditions for mobilization. These pre-conditions are based on demographics and economy. Mobilization rallies people around a cause and women gravitate towards those movements with which they can publicly

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[88]Ali Akbar Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle," *The Muslim World* 94, (October 2004), 444.

[89]Ibid., 433.

identify. In Iran, women mobilize in "diffused directions, focus on incremental gains, empower local groups, and aim for smaller but sustainable changes."[90] Women mobilizing to participate in the 2005 International Women's Day demonstrated that Iranian women want to work together to empower the women of Iran. There was a panel at the event that discussed the "Value of Women's Participation." The government hosted the event and that event provided evidence that women have the capacity to mobilize in Iran. Unfortunately, it could be argued that women were unable to influence policy because the government prohibited the event the following year.

The final component of a social movement is leadership. Publicly, women in Iran have led as parliamentarians, writers, and activists. There are several women taking the lead in organizing change in Iran. In the parliament, women have been able, at times, to influence men to pass bills. "Women parliamentarians were able to convince their male colleagues to pass a bill equalizing the pension for male and female retirees."[91] These women chose to represent the women of Iran, and they are able to lead and influence change.

Not only have the mobilized masses of Iranian women been able to affect change, individual female activists have also brought about change. Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian lawyer, was the first Muslim woman awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She received the award for her work in fighting for the rights of women and children and is the founder of the Center for Defense of Human Rights in Tehran.[92] "Her outspoken campaigns for democracy and greater rights for Iranian women and children have often brought her into conflict with conservative clerics."[93] Not only has her outspokenness brought her into conflict with the conservative clerics, but she has

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[90]Ibid., 442.

[91]Ibid., 443.

[92]Shirin Ebadi and Hadi Ghaemi, "The Human Rights Case Against Attacking Iran," *New York Times*, 8 February 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/08/opinion/08Ebadi.html?th (accessed 9 May 2008).

[93]The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "Profile: Shirin Ebadi," 10 October 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3181992.stm (accessed 10 May 2008).

also come into conflict with Iranian law and has served several jail terms.[94] Her leadership has influenced women in Iran by showing them that their cause is internationally supported and just, and that they are able to influence their society.

Although mobilizing the women into the women's movement in Iran has produced little evidence of actual influence in the domestic politics of Iran, this does not mean that movement has been ineffectual. On the contrary, there has been progress and change brought into being by the efforts of the women's movement: specifically, an increase in women serving in political positions, the publication of a multitude of journals focused on women's issues, and a dramatic change in the occupational profile of women in Iran.[95] However, the women's movement has struggled with the very problems that Huntington warned of in *Political Order in Changing Society*. The movement suffered a setback when it took matters into its own hands and boycotted the elections in 1995. The women's movement continues to suffer from the difficulty of unifying diverse groups of people towards a common purpose. Lastly, the women's movement has suffered the extreme opposition of conservative clerics and the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Conclusion

The perpetual state of tension that has plagued a peaceful resolution between the U.S. and Iran continues to be a point of contention in the Middle East today. A failure in unilateral economic sanctions and direct diplomacy may force the U.S. to explore alternate avenues to affect foreign policy in Iran. Despite mixed views on a woman's role in Iran, there is evidence that women within the Islamic culture may have the influence to affect the domestic politics of Iran. An alternate course of policy might uncover the cleavages in Iranian society that allow women to achieve levels of power and influence within the Islamic Republic.

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[94]Ibid.

While there is a sizable body of academic work on the meaning of influence, the essence of that thought distills influence down to the processes based on relationships of power and authority between actors in a given system. After establishing a means to look at influence, this paper illustrated the influence of Iranian women in the domestic politics of the Islamic Republic. An in-depth examination of the sources of support suggested by Huntington provided a base for exploring the ability of women to influence the domestic politics of Iran. The ability of women to serve as public servants and influence through state bureaucracy was minimal at best. Women have struggled to enact policy through the Guardian Council or the Expediency Council. Women have proven that they were valued, at least in public rhetoric, as a voting bloc but struggled to gain support within the state bureaucracy.

Huntington discusses four sources of support, only three of which this monograph used in order to maintain a focus on internal domestic influence in Iran: state bureaucracy, other groups, and masses of the population. Women struggle to influence directly the state bureaucracy in Iran due to the bureaucratic systems and intricacies of Iran. Women are able to express themselves through other groups, the media, film, and the Internet, but there is limited evidence to prove that women influence their audience. The most successful source of support comes from the mobilization of other women, reformists, and modernists. The problem, which Huntington warns against, is that mobilized elements of the population may face extreme opposition from the ruling power structure, they are difficult to organize, the individuals of the population may hold disparate goals, and masses may take matters into their own hands. This paper showed that all of Huntington's issues with the masses of population have frustrated the efforts of women's movements in Iran. Despite these issues, women had some success achieving modest changes in policy.

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[95]Mahdi, 441.

Two things have remained constant over the past thirty years: the relationship between women and reform and the tension between modern and traditionalism in the domestic politics of Iran. Due to a dramatic shift in roles over the past thirty years, women have oscillated between modernity and traditionalism. Through this movement, women have been able to find loopholes in the Iranian political and legal system. The Shah's government modernized the role of women in Iranian society through the Family Protection Law, the White Revolution of the 1960s, the support of women's organizations, and support of female suffrage. Additionally, the Shah appointed the first female cabinet minister.

This is not to say that there were not set backs. As the Shah experienced greater pressure from conservative Islamic clerics, women experienced restrictions on their liberty, specifically the legalization of honor killings and polygamy. After the Islamic Revolution, modernization regressed and the theocracy supported a "woman in the home" ideology. This brought about a drastic reversal in women's rights, including the nullification of the Family Protection Law and mandated wear of the veil. This shift forced women to explore Iran's political and legal systems as a means to regain rights previously held.

As the relationship between the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to deteriorate, the U.S. may want to explore an alternate form of policy to affect changes within Iran. Women in Iran represent a neglected nexus of influence within Iran's own borders that the U.S. may be able to focus on through diplomatic, informational, and economic programs tied into the international community. While there is a definite lack of causal proof that such a program would work, there is little proof that the current efforts of the U.S. government have met with much success. Regardless, women in Iran represent another avenue that the U.S. can explore to improve relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Appendix A
Timeline of the Modernization of Women in Iran

1907: First Girls School Established

1911: First Women's newspaper

1931: Civil Code, minimal changes in shari'a law, minimum age of marriage:
15 for a female and 18 for a male

1936: First Access for Women to a University Education

1936: Forced unveiling for all women

1936: Civil service open to women

1936: Ministry of Health establishes a midwifery school

1941-1953: Parliamentary monarchy –Muhammad Reza takes power

1941: Enforcement of unveiling ends

1951: Dr.Mohammed Mossadegh is elected Prime Minister

1953: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi regains power through US assistance

1953-1979: Autocratic monarchy-

1961: High Council of Women's Organizations is established

1962: Women given the right to vote (Khomeini opposes the law)

1962: Cleric led demonstrations cancel the law

1963: Decree made women's vote official

1964: Khomeini exiled to Iraq

1966: High Council of Women's Organizations is abolished in favor of Women's
Organization of Iran (WOI)

1967: Family Protection Law is passed-secularizes marriage and divorce Registration-
women may initiate divorce and limited rights to child custody

1975: Mahnaz Afkhami becomes first minister of women's affairs

1975: Marriage age rose to 18 for women and 20 for men, tightened restrictions On
polygamy

1977: Abortion legalized

1978: Iranian Revolution begins

Feb 1, 1979: Shah flees Iran

1979:

Feb 26: Family Protection Law is annulled, Islamic Law is reinstated

Mar 29: Beaches and sporting events are to be sex-segregated

August: Members of the Council of Guardians are selected

Oct: Family Protection Courts are replaced with Special Civil Courts

1980-1983: Reign of terror; estimated 6K were executed in Iran

1979-1983: Leftist/liberals are suppressed and eliminated from government

1979-today: Islamic Republic

1980: Iran gives women the vote

1980-1988: Iran-Iraq War, government calls on women to be active on home front

1982: A bill proposed to the Majles on the right of mothers to have custody of minor children over the age of two after divorce is rejected

1983: Islamic Punishment Law: 74 lashes required for any women who fails to adhere to strict hejab.

1984: Four women are elected to the First Majles: Two have a sixth-grade education

1989: Limited divorce reform bill passed stating that divorce must have court Permission

1995: Women allowed being consulting judges

1997-2004: Reformist Era

2004: Conservatives regain control of Parliament

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